

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****LANDMARK/SITE NAME:** The Humble Building**AGENDA ITEM:** IVb**OWNER:** 1212 Main S L. Realty, Ltd.**APPLICANT:** Historic Restoration Inc.**LOCATION:** 1212 Main Street**30-DAY HEARING NOTICE:** Oct-19-97**MEETING DATE:** Nov-20-97**HPO FILE NO.:** 97L014**DATE ACCEPTED:** Oct-10-97**HEARING DATE:** Nov-20-97**SITE INFORMATION**

Lots 1, 2, 4 thru 7, 9 thru 12 and part of 3 and 8, Block 271, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The Humble Building is located on the full block site bounded by Main Street, Polk Avenue, Travis Street and Dallas Avenue. The building, located in the downtown business district of Houston, consists of an original 9 story I-shaped building, constructed from 1919 to 1921, and a 17 story building, constructed from 1934 to 1936 which extends from the north elevation of the original building and fronts Dallas Avenue. The buildings are steel frame faced with gray limestone and brown and buff tapestry brick. Another wing was added in 1940 and a smaller addition was added in 1947.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

According to "Houston Architectural Survey," Volume I, prepared by the Southwest Center for Urban Research (1980), the Humble Building, later known as the Main Building, was constructed in several phases and has long been a Houston landmark. The original architectural style, an adaptation of Italian Renaissance, was followed throughout the several phases of construction. Clinton & Russell of New York, a firm well known for its skyscrapers there, designed the original building.

The Humble Building was built on the site of the Van Alstyne Home, a large Victorian Italianate mansion designed by Nicholas Clayton. It was demolished in 1918 to make way for the Humble Oil & Refining Company's new building. Ground was broken for Clinton & Russell's original building in May 1919 and the nine story building was completed in 1921. In 1932 it was the first office building in Houston to be equipped with a central air-conditioning system. John F. Staub and Kenneth Franzheim were architects of the 17 story tower which was added in 1934-1936. Another wing, at the Travis-Dallas intersection, was constructed from 1938 to 1940. A smaller addition was designed by Franzheim, Staub & Rather in 1947. All buildings are fitted and harmonize into one huge structure. In the 1950s, George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce remodeled the Clay Avenue entrance. A pavilion was added on the grounds of the Humble Building in 1963 by Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson. This small building was originally occupied by Air France, but has been radically altered on the interior by former occupants. The Humble Building cost \$1,800,000 when completed and was the largest office building in Houston. The Tower cost \$1,000,000 and the Travis wing cost \$1,200,000.

The original partners of Clinton & Russell of New York were Charles W. Clinton (1838-1910) who received his architectural training in the office of Richard Upjohn, and William Hamilton Russell (1856-1907) who worked in the office of his great-uncle, James Renwick, after studying architecture in Columbia. The firm was well known for its commercial buildings and designed some of New York's earliest skyscrapers. Later projects carried out

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by the firm, including the Humble building in Houston, were heavily influenced by the work of the founding partners.

The Humble Building is an abstract neo-classical commercial building rendered in modern adaptation of the Italian Renaissance style. The original building was a 9-story I-shaped building. The 17-story Humble Tower, which extends from the north elevation fronting on Dallas Avenue, was constructed from 1934 to 1936. The Humble Building's two end sections flanking the tower consist of ten bays along Main and Travis and four bays along Polk and Dallas. The central portion of the building is only three bays wide, but has ten bays across the east-west axis. The Humble Tower is connected to this center section with a six bay, nine story block, and then it rises 17 stories from a square base in a cruciform plan of six bays above the second floor with the corner bays recessed, leaving a four bay projection on each elevation. Originally, a central court provided a light shaft which extended down to the first floor ceiling.

The original portion of the building rests on a three foot granite base. The first floor is faced with gray limestone, but above, brown and buff tapestry brick faces the reinforced concrete structure. Cornices encircle the building above the second and sixth floors, and neo-classical pilasters, scrolled brackets and terra cotta ornament also decorate the facades. The main cornice of the original building is a heavy, bracket supported element with a wide overhang. The building contains a promenade tile roof and the tower's top three stories, set back, are a service block with giant urns at each corner. The windows are accordion fold steel framed windows.

On December 6, 1996 the Texas Historical Commission determined that the property appears to meet the National Register criteria for evaluation and will likely be listed in the National Register of Historic Places if nominated according to the procedures set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

### RESTORATION HISTORY/CURRENT CONDITION:

There have been no structural changes or modifications of any consequence since the construction of the buildings other than securing the first floor facade with plywood. The applicant has plans to convert the building to loft apartments.

### APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION....:

#### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

**S D NA**

**S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation; |

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- ☒ ☐ ☐ (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends designation of the Humble Building as a landmark to the Planning Commission since the application complies with the applicable criteria of Section 33-224.

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SITE LOCATION MAP  
THE HUMBLE BUILDING  
1212 MAIN STREET  
NOT TO SCALE

